Episode 4: Callback Tips for BigLaw Summer Associate Positions

Lee Burgess: Hello and welcome to the Law School Toolbox podcast. We're here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience so you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan: and Lee Burgess:, that's me. We're the co creators of the Law School Toolbox, the Bar Exam Toolbox, the Catapult Conference, and the Trebuchet Legal Career site.
Alison also runs the Girl's Guide to Law School. If you enjoy the show, please leave a review on iTunes. And, if you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can reach us via the contact form on LawSchoolToolbox.com, or by emailing Alison, A L I S O N, or Lee, L E E, @LawSchoolToolbox.com.
And with that, let's get started. In this episode, we'll continue our discussion about getting a big law summer associate position, and what to do as part of the callback experience. So stay tuned.

Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Last time, we talked about the basics of OCI, things like how to bid, what to expect in the initial interview and what to wear.
Today, we're going to briefly talk about the next step in the process, callback interviews, and we'll also talk about some next steps just in case OCI doesn't work out for you. So let's get started. First up, what is a callback interview and how is it different from the initial on campus interviews?

Lee Burgess: Well your first interview, which typically happens on campus or as we talked about, could happen at a hotel, is really a short get to know you interview, maybe 20 to 30 minutes.
So you'll do these short interviews with maybe one or two people and then you might get invited to do a callback interview, which is a much more extensive interview process. It usually involves short interviews with a bunch of different people. They're going to ask you different questions. They might be different positions in the firm.
You might be with associates and maybe. You know, partners of counsel and then you will go to lunch or dinner with a group of associates, and you may even need to travel to a different city to do these callback interviews.

Alison Monahan: Right, because the difference with a callback is that you actually go to the law firm that you're thinking about joining, right?

Lee Burgess: Yes, yes.

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Alison Monahan: And so you're literally, if you're thinking about, you know, summering in their L.A. office, you're going to go interview in the L.A. office. If you're thinking of going to New York, you'll interview in New York. Okay. And so one of the things that can be a little bit tricky about callbacks is that you might actually have to travel across the country particularly certain schools, you know, like in Michigan, for example, most people are going to be traveling all over the place just because there aren't a lot of law firms in Michigan.
And so that can be kind of another step that people are not really so sure about. Because for a lot of people, you know, if you're in law school, you probably haven't done necessarily a lot of business travel, and so the idea of like, what do they pay for, keeping expenses, that can be kind of a mess. I mean, Lee, you didn't really deal with this, right?

Lee Burgess: I didn't. I stayed local, but I have done a lot of business travel before that. So, It's something you definitely have to get used to, and it can be really confusing about what, who's paying for what. So do these firms expect you to pay?

Alison Monahan: Well, no, not typically. I mean, for me, I was in law school in New York, and I did some interviews in San Francisco, actually for the first summer and the second summer.
I remember for the first summer, particularly, it was richly ironic because I had, you know, submitted all of my resumes on December 1st and never really heard anything. And I actually was in California for the winter break. And the morning or the day that I got back to law school, I got an email saying, Hey, we'd love to interview you for this 1L summer associate job in San Francisco.
You know, and so I sort of emailed them back. I'm like, I was just there. And they're like, okay, well, can you get on a plane in like three days and come back? And the answer was, sure, I guess so. You know, so I think with callbacks there are a number of different ways to handle it. I mean, I had a friend in law school who was from the Bay Area and he knew that he only wanted a job in the Bay Area and so he basically just sort of decamped to San Francisco for about two weeks, I think it was but typically the firms are going to pay.
I mean, if you're interviewing with multiple firms in a city, they'll often split up the expenses, but this is all pretty standard. You know, they pay for your flight, they pay for your hotel, they pay for taxi fare. I mean, you don't want to go overboard and you don't want to, you want to make sure that anything that you're submitting doesn't have, doesn't raise any red flags or eyebrows.
You know, you hear stories about people submitting for reimbursement, the porn that they were watching in the hotel, or, I mean, I actually had a slightly

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awkward situation where I had friends in San Francisco. So when I went to interview, you know, of course we would hang out. And one night I went out to a concert, I think it was the Beastie Boys with this very good, very old friend of mine and, you know, we were not exactly sober.
And we ended up at some point hitting the hotel minibar because that seemed like a reasonable enough idea, not really thinking through like, oh, I have to actually submit, you know, my reimbursement for the hotel to the law firm. So I think I had to get them to give me two different receipts at the front desk.

One for what I paid directly and did not get reimbursed for, which was the alcohol that we drank from the mini bar. And then, you know, the things like breakfast that I did get reimbursed from the firm for. So, you know, you can finesse these situations, but. You do want to think about, is this going to send the wrong signal?
You know, you don't want to take a limousine from the airport or something like that, you know, it's like, you just, you want to be reasonable about the expenses that you're submitting, you know, and again, like, don't go out to dinner with six of your friends and try to submit that bill to the law firm.
You would think these things would be obvious, but sometimes they're not.

Lee Burgess: And you need to keep all these records. I mean, it can actually be really strange if you've never done business travel before to have to collect receipts for your Starbucks and your taxi. You know, taxis oftentimes won't give you a receipt unless you ask for it and things like that.
You can, you know, use, you know, Some electronic tools to capture this. I know a lot of people use Evernote as a way to kind of keep receipts. They can take pictures of them just so they have a backup of the receipts and you could, you know, tag them for the different firms. But you want to go in having a plan because it's very easy for it to get out of control.
You just start stuffing receipts in your bag and then they're gone.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, or you're paying cash for things. They look at your credit card bill, and you're like, I have no idea what this is. Right. Yeah, you just want to have a system. You want to have thought through it in advance. And also you've got to think through what you're bringing with you.
I mean, later on, we're going to talk about whether you should send thank you notes, for example, and some people really want to do that. But if you're going to do that, you know, you need to be prepared with your notes and your stamps and your pins and all this stuff with you. I mean, I had a situation the day before I went to interview in San Francisco where my laptop died, which kind of a

serious problem.
Luckily, at the time, I had like the IBM onsite repair plan. So I literally had them come to my hotel in San Francisco and fix my laptop. But you know, crazy stuff happens. You want, like, backups if you're traveling, backup clothing, you know, what if you spill something on your only tie? Right. You know, bring a second tie, bring a third tie.

Lee Burgess: It's true.
I actually had to go once, this was before I went to law school, but I was at a conference all day and I spilled iced tea all over my outfit, so I had to go to Ann Taylor at lunch and buy a new outfit. It was not appropriate for me to continue wearing that outfit for the rest of the day.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I haven't quite done that.
I definitely have had to go buy like hosiery or something. If you get a run, if you're wearing a skirt suit and you get a run, like, what are you going to do? You know, you want to have backup. I actually. I think it was at trial and I went through like three backup pairs of pantyhose by lunchtime for some reason and I had to go to like the Walgreens and buy pantyhose at lunchtime.
Yeah, think about things like how are you going to get stuff cleaned? You know, if you're doing, if you're in a city and you're doing, say, it wouldn't be particularly unusual to be in a city for two or three days and to do, say, four or five interviews. So, you know, those are back to back. You know, you need to think about, like, how are you going to get your suit cleaned if you have to or things like that.
These are, you know, none of these are impossible, but it just definitely complicates matters if you are traveling.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and you just need to plan ahead. I mean, even things like, what are you going to do about missing class? You know, Alison's friend who camped out in San Francisco for two weeks. I'm sure he missed a little bit of class.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. And you know, your professors really don't care that you're having to go do interviews. I mean, you know, certain schools will give you a certain amount of time off sometimes, but it's typically not gonna, I mean, callback season is crazy. You know, you're gonna be traveling all over the place, you're doing these interviews, even if you're in, like, even in New York, I was also interviewing in New York, and so you'd spend, you know, You know, an entire day on like a Wednesday or Thursday tramping around New York, like interviewing.

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It's very time consuming. Yeah, so you need a plan for how you're going to get notes in your classes. Are there people that you can trade notes with? You know, if they're going to be there and you're not going to be there. And luckily, by the second year, people are a little bit less competitive, I think, so they're more likely to help you.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: And everybody's kind of in the same boat. But, I mean, it definitely makes for, you know, particularly, like, a really busy September and even into October.

Lee Burgess: For sure. And, you know, we talked about having your backup outfits just in case something happens. But what do you wear to these callbacks?

Alison Monahan: Well, I mean, like, you know, it's the same thing that basically you wear to your opening interview., like you said, your idea of having two suits, I think it's a good one because then you can know that the people have not seen the same outfit because sometimes when you do a callback. You know, they'll, as a sort of, to make it more friendly, they'll actually have you see the person that you spoke with on campus.
I mean, that's not unheard of. Or you might see the recruiting coordinator again, who perhaps you met on campus or whatever. So I think it's typically better to have a little bit of variety in your outfit, even if it's just a different tie or a different colored shirt. Definitely want to wear comfortable shoes, even more so than in your initial interviews, because you're going to be and I'm going to be walking around, you know, if you do pretty typically probably like I would say, five to six interviews is pretty standard, you know, 20 minutes, 30 minutes with different people at the firm, plus lunch.
So you're looking usually at a good three to four hours. Yup. And you know, if your feet are killing you by the end, oftentimes Maybe not everywhere, but you know, in a city like you're going to walk to lunch.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, we did that. Yep.

Alison Monahan: You know, and if you're like in tears by the time you get there, you might not be the best companion.

Lee Burgess: It's true, for sure. And think also about how much stuff you need to lug with you to these interviews, you know, if you don't need to have, you know, your laptop or your school bag, don't take all that.

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Alison Monahan: Definitely not.

Lee Burgess: And I am notorious for, especially now like I'm a mom, carrying the suitcase bag that, that, you know, that you can live out of.
It's great if you're hungry. Alison can say it.

Alison Monahan: Oh yeah, I know. You've saved me several times.

Lee Burgess: I know. I've always got snacks and things like that. But, I wouldn't take that to an interview because I don't want to drag it around. You look You feel kind of frumpy if you've got a bunch of junk with you.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, you want to streamline, but at the same time, you know, you should bring extra copies of your resume, extra copies of your transcript, maybe one copy of a writing sample.
And the reason for bringing the resume in, I can tell you from having been the interviewer in this situation, what happens a lot of times at firms, I mean, so for you, this interview is, you know, the biggest thing that's going on in your life that day. It's really important, you prep for it, you're nervous about it, but the people that you're interviewing with, that is not the case.
Like, they're lawyers, they have work to do. This is half an hour out of their day that they can't bill to anyone, that they basically are doing as a favor to the recruiting coordinator, and what often happens is, you know, you'll be scheduled to meet with, you know, person X, Y, and Z, and it's completely fair, and we suggest that you do actually ask in advance who you're going to be meeting with, so that you can look them up, have a general idea of, you know, what topics they work on, you know, what kinds of cases they work on, something about their background, what they look like just so you feel more comfortable. But you can't really rely on actually meeting the same people, and I would say it was a rare callback where I met the exact five people or six people that they told me I was going to be meeting with.
Because what happens is someone gets called in for a last minute hearing or there's a client emergency and suddenly the recruiting coordinator is scrambling and it's like, okay, who's on my speed dial that's like owes me a favor,

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: And so you get that call that's like, Hey, so I'm really sorry. I know you're busy. But, we have this callback coming in and, you know, so and so really can't do it. I really need you to do this. Can you, can you, can I bring them by in 10 minutes?

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Lee Burgess: And I think it's often the higher up lawyers who this happens to more often. You know, I think that, I remember from my callbacks, it was the partners who oftentimes got swapped out, which can be more intimidating because partners typically are more intimidating than associates who remember what it was like, but they're more likely to get called away for something important or a client phone call.
And so, you know, you do have to be ready to, you know, talk to somebody who you have no idea who they are and be ready to roll, you know.

Alison Monahan: Well, the other thing too is I think you cannot assume that they have any familiarity with the documents that you have provided to them.

Lee Burgess: That's true.

Alison Monahan: For two reasons.
One, if I agreed to do this interview like a month ago, which is usually when they set them up or, you know, weeks ago, because then you'll say yes to whatever. So, you know, so they might send me a copy of the resume or a copy of, you know, whatever in that email, like, oh, great. Thanks so much for agreeing to talk to Suzy three weeks from now. Here's her resume. And I'm like, great. Okay. That's off into the ether. I'm not looking at it. You know, so maybe if the recruiting coordinator is on top of their game, you'll get a copy in your inbox that morning, but maybe not. You know, so I've done a lot of interviews with law students where literally, you know, I got their resume maybe five minutes before.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: Or in some cases I didn't get it and I just had to be like, hey, you know, I'm really sorry.
Like, I was called in at the last minute to do this interview and I don't have a copy of your documents. Do you mind handing me a copy of your resume?

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: And the answer to that question needs to be, sure, here you go.

Lee Burgess: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: Not, oh I don't really have it with me. Because what in the world are we going to talk about this?

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Lee Burgess: Right, exactly. Yeah. Yeah, you want to look over prepared, you know, in that way.

Alison Monahan: And you want to be over prepared.

Lee Burgess: Yes, and be over prepared.

Alison Monahan: For sure. And, you know, you also can't assume that as the interviewee that people are going to have, like, great questions to ask you. Because the reality is most of the people doing these interviews have not been trained.
I mean, I certainly, I don't think I got any training in how to do an interview. You know, I asked people whatever I wanted to ask them.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. Whatever is important to you and you think makes a difference.

Alison Monahan: Right, I mean, and for me it was literally, you know, I just looked at it as a conversation essentially.
And it's a question of like, you know, does this person seem, do they seem smart, do they seem competent, do they seem like someone who would do a good job, but they seem like someone who would drive me completely crazy if I had to go to trial with them.
You know, that's basically what you're being evaluated on, you know, and so, like what kind of image should people be trying to portray here, do you think?

Lee Burgess: You know, I think it's an authentic image. You know, we talked about authenticity a number of podcasts ago, about, you know, who you are and what kind of lawyer you want to be. You want to be authentic. The best version of yourself. It's like going on a date, you know, , right? You wanna be the, the sparkly, shiniest version of yourself, but you want it to still be you. Because I think one time, one thing that people often forget is that you are also interviewing the firm. It needs to be a good fit for all parties, definitely. And so if you're not being yourself, then you will be yourself at some point while you work there, and they might not feel like you're a good fit. Or, if you feel like, oh, I'm a good fit as long as I pretend to be somebody else, it can be very exhausting for you, and you're probably not going to be happy. So, you know, be appropriate. Maybe choose the stories you tell carefully, or your answers carefully, but still talk, still be yourself.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that's good advice. I mean, Obviously, you know, anyone who's gone on a date, I think that's a really good analogy. Like, you know, you're

presenting the sort of most positive, upbeat version of yourself. It is not that it's not true. It's just maybe you're not entirely that agreeable in real life.
Maybe you don't always work exactly that hard. But I mean, typically the questions here are pretty softball. Again, it's stuff like, you know, how do you like law school? What are your favorite classes? What type of work are you interested in doing? What interests you about this firm? Why do you think it's a good fit?
Why do you want to be in the city? And one of the things, particularly outside of New York, is you really need a good answer to the location question. Because a lot of places, like in San Francisco, Even though I'd lived in San Francisco for many years before going to law school in New York, they still wouldn't hire me as a summer because they thought I just wanted like a summer vacation in San Francisco.

Lee Burgess: Yep. I think that actually happens a lot of different places. I mean, even in more I am from an area of California known as the Central Valley, and Fresno is the largest metropolitan area down there. And since I was from there I did some interviews down there when I was before my 2L summer. And I didn't end up working down there, but one of their big concerns were people go up to the big city, they get their law degrees and they come back to a rural area to just try and grab some experience and then they immediately pull the plug and leave again. And they didn't want to invest in people who wanted to do that. And that's totally fair. And I've heard that from other places around the country, especially outside of the big firm options like, if you want to be a DA or something like that, oftentimes, you know, small rural communities will have easier jobs to get because there's less competition, but then they are, I think a lot of people are really wary about somebody who's quickly going to jump ship to go back to wherever they want to.
So you better have some compelling answers if you want to convince them that you really want to be in that location.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think viewing it as an investment that this organization is making in you is actually a good way to look at it. You know, ask yourself, like, based on what I'm ready, based on what I'm going to tell them, Would I invest in me?

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: And honestly, I don't think that the firms that, you know, had that approach in San Francisco were wrong. Like, they basically were right. I pretty much was going to take a job in You know, but in fairness, I also, I didn't lie about it. Like, I

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could have put, I could have told a more convincing story, but then I didn't want to put myself in the position of turning down that job after telling them I was definitely going to take it because I just thought for the long term that that was probably not the best approach.

Lee Burgess: Right. Yeah, I mean, you've got to think about this stuff and think about how you're presenting yourself. I think these interviews get easier the more that you do.

Alison Monahan: Oh God, they're totally formulaic. They're

Lee Burgess: Really formulaic. But you know, you want to be comfortable in your own skin when you're talking about this kind of stuff, or they're not going to find you, you know, to be the kind of person they want to work with all the time.

Alison Monahan: The other thing that I think you get better at is in the beginning, they're incredibly exhausting.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: You know, to be on, particularly if you're a little bit introverted, which a lot of law students are, to be really on, you know, for four or five hours, can take a lot out of you. And so I think in terms of scheduling, that's one thing to think about when you're scheduling callbacks is can you really do two sets of callbacks in a day?

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that would be rough.

Alison Monahan: No, it is. I mean, I've done it. It's not fun. And there are ways you can kind of massage it. Like the firms understand you're interviewing other places. And so, you know, if you are making a quick trip, you know, sometimes they can cut out one of the interviews or maybe you don't do lunch, you just do coffee.
You know, so it's fair to address that with a recruiting coordinator and say, look, you know, really, I'm trying to schedule several things. I definitely want to see you guys in the morning. You know, you're my top priority. But would it be possible, you know, to be finished by one o'clock or whatever?

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: And typically they're pretty accommodating.

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Lee Burgess: Yeah, I mean, they, they want you to also want to work there.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, that's a good point too. It's like, you know, in your, if you have an interaction with a firm where they're unyielding, and they say, no, absolutely, like, we have, you know, we, there's no possible way we can do this.
We're not going to make any accommodations for you. Like, that tells you something about what it might be like to work there.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's very true. Yeah. All right, so before we talk about how you pick your firm, when you're done with these callback interviews, do you still think it's worth it to send a handwritten thank you note, be very old school, or is it an email, or is it even not worth it to do anything?

Alison Monahan: Well, maybe it's because I was raised in the South but I think it's polite to send thank you notes. Not necessarily a handwritten note. I think that's completely a personal option. I think sending something, however, is polite. And certainly when I got an email from a student that I had interviewed or sometimes a handwritten note, I mean, it did impact my impression of them.
I liked them more. So, you know, the sort of way to handle this, there are two ways, basically. Either you send a handwritten note that afternoon or you can send an email. And, you know, people typically, if they remember, they'll provide you with a card. You can ask them at the end of the interview, like, Hey, you know, do you have a card in case I want to get back in touch with you or whatever?
I mean, you know, the thank you note is pretty formulaic. It goes something like, hi, Lee. It was so great to meet you this afternoon. Thanks so much for taking the time out of your schedule to talk with me. I really appreciate it. I enjoyed learning more about your work on Product Liability Case X.
That sounds so interesting, and I hope that the summary judgment motion you're working on goes well. I'd love to work at, you know, firm whatever, thanks so much again. Let me know if you have any questions. Bye.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's great.

Alison Monahan: You know, like you want to ideally mention something that you talked about. This is a great place for your index cards to come in handy because you can actually have an index card. And you write down what you're going to write in your thank you note when you take a little bathroom break. Yep. Because if you're talking to six people in a day, you're not going to remember the first interview by the end of it.

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Lee Burgess: That is so true. So true.

Alison Monahan: So, you know, make a quick note of, here's the case that I want to mention, here's the thing I want to say and something nice about you know, whatever it is. Yeah. It's not rocket science, but it does take a little bit of pre planning.

Lee Burgess: Yep.

Alison Monahan: One of the other things I just wanted to bring up sort of along these lines of like. Basic politeness. It's quite interesting because almost always when you start your interviews, whether, I mean, I noticed this in clerkship interviews or at law firms, people are going to ask you if you want something. It's like, oh, you know, do you like any water or coffee, tea, whatever? And I think sometimes people think it's rude to say yes to that.
I actually think it's the opposite. I think you should always accept the water.

Lee Burgess: I like that.

Alison Monahan: Because. There are good studies that show basically when people do you a favor, they like you more.

Lee Burgess: That's true.

Alison Monahan: And so when, you know, somebody, oftentimes when I was a clerk, when we were doing clerkship interviews, we would be the first people that they interacted with.
You know, the secretary would bring them in and I would say, oh, you know, can I get you anything? Would you like some water? And people said no. I was a little like, oh, how rude. So, you know, it's a subtle thing, but, you know, really thinking through like how you can leave a good impression. And obviously, I mean, this should, I think, go without saying, but we'll say it anyway.
You want to be polite to everyone in the building. From the parking attendant who helps you with your car, to the person who you sign in with, to the person that you meet at the front desk, you know, to the secretary, like, if you're rude to anyone, game over.

Lee Burgess: Yep.

Alison Monahan: I mean, this is not even, you know, not even an issue.

Lee Burgess: Agreed.

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Alison Monahan: Same thing if, even when you go out to lunch, you know, if you are rude to the waiter, you Oh my god, are you kidding me? I could never hire you. You know, it's just these things where you're like, you could do great in your interviews, and then you get to lunch, and you're being demanding and rude, and you're sending stuff back, and just like, really?

I don't want to work with this person.

Lee Burgess: No, it's so true. But when we're talking about lunch, another thing I think often people aren't sure what to do at lunch or dinner is, What to order? You know, do you order multiple courses? Do you try and wait till someone else orders at the table? Do you drink?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, your strategy is not to go first.

Lee Burgess: Right. I love that. That's always my strategy, too. I always, if they ask me first, I'd suggest somebody else goes first.

Alison Monahan: Right, or I mean, I think it's totally fair if you're getting the sense that you might be put on the spot to say, So what are other people thinking about getting? What looks good?

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: Because then you can find out, you know, that the senior associate at the table is going to say, oh, you know, I'm thinking I might start with a soup and then move on to the pasta.

Lee Burgess: Right. And then you're like, oh, good, okay, then it's okay.

Alison Monahan: Like, okay, I can have a salad.

Lee Burgess: To have a salad. Exactly.

Alison Monahan:: But if he's like, oh, you know, I'm kind of in a rush. I think I'm just going to go with, like, you know, the hamburger. You're like, great. I'm not going to have a salad.

Lee Burgess: Right. Exactly. So don't start. Don't be the person ordering the most at the table. That's not who you want to be, and maybe don't order the most extensive thing off the menu.

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Alison Monahan: Yeah, you're looking for like the mid range option, easy to eat, nothing offensive, don't get the veal. I mean, these are just things that you want to like give brief consideration to. And you know, something that's not messy, you don't want to be spilling things everywhere. Probably like, you know, tacos might not be your best choice.
But yeah, I mean, you want to be, this is, this is your time to go in the middle of the road. This is when, if you're a golfer, this is your two putt.

Lee Burgess: Yep.

Alison Monahan: So what about drinking? Well, I think at lunch, drinking is typically a terrible idea. Yeah, me too. I just, I mean, if somebody's like really pressuring you to share the bottle of wine or whatever, be like, oh, I'll take a sip.
Or not. I mean, dinner is a little bit trickier because there, there often is more drinking. Well, I mean, obviously you should not get drunk.

Lee Burgess: That's true.

Alison Monahan: I think it's completely fine if you don't drink or you don't want to drink. Just to say, you know, I really would prefer like sparkling water or whatever.
I don't know. I mean, do you have thoughts on this?

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think, again, watch what the other people are doing, if you are someone who will have a glass of wine and everyone else at the table is having wine, I don't feel like you can't have a glass of wine.

Alison Monahan: Right, I think if it's something you're comfortable with, it's completely fine, but if you're not comfortable with it, I think it's fine, too.

Lee Burgess: It's fine, too. I think, you know, the one to two drink maximum rule, like, you shouldn't be over the legal limit to drive while you're at an event like this. You know, you definitely want to be the soberest person at the table. And sometimes other attorneys will get really inappropriately drunk at these events.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, well, or just inappropriate in general. I mean, you know, that's another question we haven't really talked about is, what do you do if you get some totally inappropriate question in an interview?

Lee Burgess: Oh, that's a tough one. Doesn't that happen to you? I, I never, luckily never, was put in that position, but I think it's happened to you.

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Alison Monahan: Well, I don't, I didn't exactly have an inappropriate question. My very first on campus interview was with, a very inappropriate partner. It was completely lecherous and was hitting on me the entire time which was not really the greatest introduction to doing these interviews. It was actually kind of traumatic.

It was horrible. I mean, it was just completely lecherous. It was like a dirty old man basically. And yeah, they offered me the callback and I said no. And I basically the recruiting coordinator was like, why? I'm like, to be perfectly honest, like you need to look at who you've got doing these interviews because this guy should not be talking to like potential associates.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: And it was this moment of like, Oh, thanks so much for letting us know that. But I mean, they do happen. I mean, I think it's really hard, particularly if the questions are potentially illegal. You know, stuff along the lines of like, oh, I see you're wearing an engagement ring. Like, when's the wedding?

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: And, you know, I think you have to decide how that was intended and how you're going to react to it. I don't think there's a right or wrong answer. I mean, in some cases, I think people don't necessarily think about what they just asked. Right. I mean, that question is basically illegal.

Lee Burgess: Right, and I don't think most people would necessarily think about that, but I do know female friends of mine who won't wear engagement rings or wedding rings to interviews just to try not to welcome those questions, which, again, you shouldn't have to do.
But, you know, if you, that's just one option of ways to kind of try and minimize the discussion of your personal life.

Alison Monahan: No, I had similar things, particularly with people who were engaged, where it was like they had the big flashy ring, and it was like, do I really want to be having this conversation? But at the same time, like, of course, that's, you know, that's kind of your life.

Lee Burgess: Right, yeah. So you have to do what you feel right, but people, you know. On the other extreme, I have a friend who is a criminal defense lawyer, or a public

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defender, and she, Before she met her husband, she would wear a fake wedding ring because it made it easier to deal with clients.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, you know, all these things are valid options.
Well, what kind of questions should students have for people in these callbacks or even in the first on campus interviews, because that's a big question that always comes up. Well, what am I supposed to ask them? Do I have to ask them anything?

Lee Burgess: Well, yes. You need to have questions.

Alison Monahan: Yes, the answer is yes.
You do need to have something prepared.

Lee Burgess: Well, I think going back to some of the things we talked about, And our last podcast, you want to get a bit more feedback about the type of work that's actually done in the office. I mean, I think especially at a callback is your opportunity to talk to individual associates and partners about their work. Workload and cases, you know, like what sort of cases is the firm in that office doing right now?

Alison Monahan: Right, on a daily basis. Yes, sort of theoretically.

Lee Burgess: And also, you know, what's your day in the life? You know, are you an associate doing eight hours of billable document review? Which is totally possible and reasonable like if so, it's fair I think to ask.

Alison Monahan: Right, and I think there's a polite and more subtle way to ask that question. Obviously you don't wanna go in and be like, so how many hours am I gonna work every day? Right. Is that is not, that is not a question for a callback interview. No, that is. That is a question you can ask after you have the offer.

Lee Burgess: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: You are basically entitled to return to the firm or allowed to return, and at that point you can ask those questions.

Lee Burgess: Yes.

Alison Monahan: That is not a question for a callback. However, a more subtle version of that question would be something along the lines of. So, like, you know, I'm

interested in what you do every day.
Like, could you give me an idea of, you know, what your last few days have looked like? And then you find out, like, well, you know, did they work only on document review? Did they, were they writing a brief? Were they in meetings? Like, what were they doing? And, you know, that's actually a legitimately interesting question, typically, that you can ask everyone, you know. It's a good one to have in your back pocket.

Lee Burgess: I also think asking questions about, you know, Mentorship and training can be really valid questions. You know, what, especially to associates, like, do you have mentorship relationships with more senior attorneys? You know, do you have some training programs where you're getting, you know, training to do, especially if you're in litigation, due depositions and things like that.
I mean, I think, again, read the website, what they say, but a lot of times they don't talk about kind of some of that internal stuff.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and you want to phrase those as kind of softball questions. You don't want to be like, so, you know, is there any mentoring at this firm? It's like, so, you know, it seems like a really like, you know, I don't know what's the right word, a little, very, this is why you have to prepare your questions in advance. Literally write them down.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: You know, this seems like a really collegial place to work. Do you find that you've, you know, have you had success finding mentors here?

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: Like, that's a nice way of phrasing that. And, I mean, the answer might be no. Like, you know, I think it's fair, too, to ask people, you know, again, in a polite way, like, so, you know, what's your experience been like?
Do you like working here? Yeah. Particularly the associates.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, particularly the associates.

Alison Monahan: I mean, I had people, more than once, at least I can think of ,I mean, in one case, particularly in New York, this woman, attorney, I asked her that question, and she looked at me, and she said, can you close the door, and I closed the door, and she said, to be perfectly honest, I absolutely hate every day of my life, and I would not work here.

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Lee Burgess: That's honest, you know?

Alison Monahan: You gotta get repressed for the honesty. And the reality is, she wasn't gonna tell me that until I asked her. So, you know, I think it's fair to ask. I mean, obviously people will lie to you. I had another situation where a friend of a friend was miserable as like a sixth year at some firm in New York, dying to leave, you know, like exploring all of his options.
And I knew this from the friend. And I met him at a cocktail party and I was like, oh, you know, I have a callback there next week. How do you like it? He's like, oh, it's so great. You know, like my colleagues are really smart and blah, blah, blah. So this was like at a party. People will definitely lie to you at a callback.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. But, I mean, not all of them. Yeah, not all of them, but they might. I mean, they're, they're toting the party line, and sometimes the recruiters are only going to pick people that they think are going to, you know.

Alison Monahan: Well, that's the thing. A smart recruiter is not having you talk to the people that hate working there.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. What about questions, you know, relating to things like work life balance you know, the billable hour requirement?

Alison Monahan: I would not ask any of those in a callback

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I mean, I think you're dancing on some kind of dangerous ground only because you don't know how it's going to be perceived.

Alison Monahan: Well, the point is you can get that information later, and I think it's absolutely valid to get it later, but I don't think a callback is the right place to be talking about your work life balance.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and what about women's issues? Like, if you're interested in them having a women's initiative or a women's committee women in leadership in the firm, I don't know, what do you think about that kind of stuff?

Alison Monahan: I mean, again I can see, like, maybe if it's somebody who's, like, the head of the women's committee and you know that from having researched them on the website, then it's a softball question, like, oh, you know, it looks like you guys have a great commitment to advancing women. Can you tell me more about that?

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Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: That's a different question. I mean, typically, I would think I would avoid it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I mean, we I was at one, firm interview where the, one of the high, high level partners of the whole firm, the international firm was a woman and it was a very big deal that she come from that office.
And so I think I was meeting with a woman and that woman had asked me something about, you know, women in leadership or women in leadership in law firms. And I said, one of the things I liked about this firm was that they had promoted a woman and that that woman came from this office. And so it was kind of like introduced to me as a topic.

Alison Monahan: I mean, that's, that's totally fine.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. But I think you have to be. You have to be thoughtful, you're not, if you don't know who your audience is.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I just think in general, again, like you can ask these questions later when you have the offer in hand.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, so offers, how did you get your offers? Did they call you?
How did you find out if you got an offer?

Alison Monahan: Oh God, I have no idea.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I have no idea. I think I got phone calls.

Alison Monahan: I think it varied. I mean, the other thing is like people should look at the NALP guidelines. You know, NALP has guidelines on timing and how long you can keep offers open and all that kind of stuff.

You should be generally, if you're interviewing, you should be generally familiar with those.

Lee Burgess: Yep.

Alison Monahan: Well, I mean, I guess before we wrap up, let's talk a little bit about what are we looking for in these callbacks? Like, how should people go about selecting a firm?

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Lee Burgess: You know, you really want to look at the long view.
I think you want to remember that you're going to work with these folks. So do you like the vibe? You know, I remember visiting some firms where the halls were spookily quiet, like everybody's door was shut. So weird. Yeah, so weird. I heard no talking. And I didn't see anyone talking to each other. And even the support staff.
And that was spooky to me.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, some of it was like a graveyard.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and I, if you haven't noticed already, like to run my mouth, and it seemed like not a good fit for me. Because I don't like sitting in a room with my door shut the whole day. And do you think these people could be your friends? You're gonna spend a lot of time with these folks.
So, you know, do you, what, get along with them? Do you think they're interesting people, do you think they seem smart? Do you want to learn from them, you know, because when you come on these people are gonna be your superiors. And then I think what type of work you're interested in, you know, going back to even when we were talking about the first round interviews when I talked about you know, interviewing at a firm that did tobacco litigation, that sounded like the worst thing in the world to me.
If you don't like the work that they do, Maybe that's not what you want to sign up for, because in the end, this is your job, possibly after graduation. You want to make it a good fit or you're not going to be successful there.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. I mean, I think you have to be looking at, is this a place I can see myself being comfortable?

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: And if the answer to that question is no, It doesn't matter how prestigious the firm is, it is probably not a good fit for you.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, life is too short.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and you know, it's like people have all sorts of, you know, we're all different people.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

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Alison Monahan: But finding a place that, you know, firms are different too.
They have different political persuasions, you know, some of them are more conservative, some are more liberal. You know, if you happen to be, say, someone who's a gay man, like, maybe you don't want to go into a firm that's known to be very conservative or that's, you know, in some cases worked on, you know, opposing gay marriage or something like that.
These are valid considerations you know, and of course, like the type of work and the type of work you could possibly be doing. It's one thing for the firm to have a department, but if that department is extremely small and extremely competitive, And they're going to have 20 summers, and maybe one is going to get to do that type of work.
Again, I think these are questions you probably want to ask more in a follow up interview. Like, to really, really get down in the nitty gritty of, Okay, you know, you've told me I can maybe do this type of work. What do you think the likelihood of that is?
I don't think that's something to be addressed in a callback.

Lee Burgess: No but it's, as much as you can fish this information out, I mean, I remember going to a callback where, They had really been promoting the firm as having this very broad litigation practice, but then everyone I interviewed with all did construction litigation. And so at the end, I was basically with one of the associates.
I said, so it really seems like Construction litigation is kind of what's going on. And it was like, well, yeah. And I said, so if someone didn't want to work on construction litigation, like, what are the other options? And it basically came out, there was no other options. That firm, that office. Which is really important.

Which is really important. And I'm like, okay, well, good to know. And he's like, do you want to do construction litigation? I was like, not really. So I didn't get an offer, but I didn't want to work there, you know, so that's no problem.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, let's talk about that. So what if you do these interviews and you strike out?
I mean, at that point, I think what I would tell people, what I do tell people is, number one, it's not the end of the world if you don't get a big law summer associate position. I mean, there are great perks to it, largely the fact that you get paid a lot. But A, it doesn't mean that you can never have a big law job if that's something you're really dedicated to.

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And it also, frankly, It opens up the possibility of finding something that is going to be a better long term fit.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I mean, there are still other firms that will hire summers, you know, and you can have summer opportunities that don't necessarily come to this kind of on campus interviewing. And you know, that's where networking and you know, meeting people and talking to different people really comes into play.
Your legal career is not over. By any stretch of imagination?

Alison Monahan: No, no. At the beginning of your what? Beginning of your second year?

Lee Burgess: Right, exactly. Yeah. No, it's not over. Like if you don't have a job in October of your second year, you're still gonna be fine. You know? There's still a future for you,

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Often schools have additional job fairs that bring in smaller employers and things like that. You know, you're gonna have to hustle, you're gonna have to get out there, meet people, you know, do that networking. It is definitely gonna be a little bit harder, no doubt. But ultimately, you know, something like 80 percent of big law associates leave in the first five years.
So if you get one of these jobs, it's not like you've solved your job problem forever anyway. But yeah, I mean, I think, you know, I think that can be a time, if OCI doesn't work out, it could really be a time to take stock and say, okay, you know, what is it that I really want to be doing? I got kind of caught up.
In this hype about the summer thing, but you know, is this really what I wanna be doing? And spending some time on that.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that sounds like a good future podcast topic

Alison Monahan: Actually, that would be great. Yeah. Maybe we should do that.

Lee Burgess: Going on the list, stay tuned.

Alison Monahan: Going on the list. All right.

Lee Burgess: All right. And with that, I think we're out of time.
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